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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000606

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP AUGUST 1, 2005

REF: BRATISLAVA 532

Classified By: CDA Scott N. Thayer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

DOES SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE HAVE A PRAYER?

11. (SBU) Progressive political party Alliance of New Citizens (ANO) has drafted a law which would change Slovakia's current religious registration system (under which registered churches receive state funding) to abolish state funding and, in essence, make religious groups equal to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a move to begin separating church and state. The law would allow Slovak citizens to earmark up to 2.7 percent of their annual income tax as a contribution to NGOs or religious groups, up from the current 2 percent limit that citizens can donate to NGOs only. While the reform would bring vast improvements to the financing and operation of small religious groups, it does not have the support yet of many conservative politicians; Hungarian party SMK considers the law to be a simple liberal campaign trick, and the Prime Minister's own Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) has called it a "very sensitive" proposal. We note, however, that regardless of political will or public opinion, the proposal may face purely financial challenges; the earmarked 2.7 percent tax contribution may not provide the same level of financial support to the institutions.

12. (C) During an August 1 lunch with ANO Vice Chair Katarina Gloncakova-Golev, Poloffs were told that ANO does not plan to abandon the religious funding law. While she admitted that it could appear to be a campaign publicity stunt, she insisted that ANO's support for this issue -- fueled by their disappointment with what the party sees as a lack of transparency in the current financing system -- will continue in the future.

SMER: "WE'RE THE JOHN KERRY TO DZURINDA'S GEORGE BUSH"

13. (C) Marek Madaric, the head of the social democratic Smer party's press and media relations department, gave Poloffs an overview of the party's current posture, future plans, and outlook on U.S. foreign policy. Madaric told us that on Iraq policy, Smer is the "John Kerry" to Prime Minister Dzurinda's "George Bush." While the party respects Slovakia's contributions to the Coalition and the ongoing reconstruction effort, it remains against the war. Other interlocutors tell us that Smer, which recently joined the Europe-wide social democrat movement, is taking its foreign policy marching orders from abroad. When asked what this would mean if Smer head Robert Fico were elected Prime Minister next year, Madaric said that not much would change; he said that while Smer's occasionally anti-U.S., anti-war rhetoric may get air time during the elections, the statements are for campaign purposes only. Smer must make such statements, he explained, to retain its credibility as an opposition party. However, Smer and Fico will try to keep the campaign -- and if they get their wish, the government -- focused on domestic issues first.

14. (C) Regarding possible partnerships for next year's national and parliamentary elections, Madaric said Fico is open to working with any party, though he pointed out that the party of European Socialists does not allow them to work with "extremist groups." (Comment: When asked if Smer was thus precluded from working with the Slovak National Party (SNS), Madaric backpedaled, noting that whether SNS was an extremist group was still open for debate. End Comment.) However, Madaric said that partnership with Dzurinda's SDKU is least likely, as it is "a basic enemy" of Smer. Partnership with Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), Slovak Hungarian Coalition (SMK), or KDH could also be problematic, he explained, though cooperation with Alliance of New Citizens (ANO), Free Forum (SF), or Movement for Democracy (HZD) could be achieved without problem. (COMMENT: We forbore pointing out Senator Kerry's fate in the last election, which ironically somewhat mirror's Smer's. Madaric's "we don't mean it" has worn thin, but Smer keeps trying to convince us that walking and talking like a duck doesn't make them one. We don't buy it, and we keep telling them so. END COMMENT)

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS CORRUPTION JUDGE'S CAR ACCIDENT

15. (SBU) Jan Hrubala, the former head of the government's anti-corruption office who was recently appointed as a judge in Slovakia's special court for corruption, was involved in a car accident July 18 in the town of Ziar nad Hronom. In the aftermath of the accident, Hrubala refused to submit to a breathalyzer and/or blood test to determine whether or not he had been under the influence of alcohol (Note: Slovakia has a zero tolerance law for drinking and driving under which any evidence of alcohol in the bloodstream is above the legal limit. End Note). Minister of Justice Daniel Lipsic announced that he would investigate the accident, and Hrubala himself demanded that a full police inquiry be made in lieu of a written reprimand. Some opposition politicians have already expressed doubt that Hrubala should or will be allowed to continue on in his capacity as a judge at the special court, even though no criminal behavior has yet been proved and Hrubala's track record on corruption issues is long and distinguished.

16. (C) On July 27, we contacted Hrubala (a longtime contact of the Embassy on matters of corruption) to express our concern and inquire about his condition. Hrubala is currently resting and recovering at his home in Banska Bystrica. Having suffered a serious concussion in the car accident, Hrubala does not remember the events leading up to the accident, but he told us that he is now starting to have small flashbacks of the crash. He told us quite openly of his feelings of guilt and shame over the incident, and his desire to see it come to a close. He denied that he had consumed any alcohol before the accident, and cannot remember refusing the breathalyzer in the moments following the wreck. Hrubala said he did not understand some of the neurological and medical reports he has received following the accident, and felt isolated and lonely in the aftermath. Hrubala will meet with neurologists at a Bratislava hospital the coming weeks, and will also speak with a psychiatrist about some of the lingering psychological problems he is experiencing. On August 3, the Slovak media reported that Hrubala has been charged in connection with the accident.

THAYER

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